1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

them with holdings in other parts of the country when in the latter much mountain land is included. The valuations, however, are exceedingly high, the full valuation of the Ennis district (which includes the Fergus plain) being £67,000 for 112,000 acres compared with the neighboring Killadysert district at £25,000 for 62,000 acres.

The second of the "ranching districts" or areas of large holdings practicing this type of agriculture is the region in the northern part of the county called "the hills of Burren" (the Ballyvaughan area). This is a limestone country which provides rich winterage for cattle. Consequently land there is very valuable to the rancher who has to winter his store cattle. Grass grows there fairly richly throughout the winter among the limestone crags, and the cattle are allowed to forage for themselves. In several cases, farmers own large holdings of 200 acres and over in each of the two areas. They drive their cattle down from the winterages in April and back again in November.

Certain other farms of large size, and especially in rich alluvial areas such as Clarecastle and Newmarket-on-Fergus, make extensive use of tillage, primarily of oats. In other areas such as Tubber, Broadford, and Feakle, mountain land is given over to sheep.

County Clare, in fact, shows a fourfold division into sections differentiated partly geographically, partly by the different utilization of the soil. "West Clare" includes all the peninsula west and south of the ridge culminating in Mount Callan and cutting off the Fergus drainage from the Atlantic. Here the holdings are predominantly small, and the more generalized economy is common. "North Clare" covers the country of the "hills of Burren." "East Clare" contains both the rough country of Feakle and Broadford, where small mountain holdings approximate the conditions of West Clare, and the Tulla and Quin districts, which with "Mid-Clare" and "South Clare" cover the alluvial plain of the

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

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CORN HARVEST

[Frontispiece]

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

181 Fleure writes of Wales, another section of "The Celtic Fringe": "the isolated rural communities are, of themselves, poor in material resources, and their efforts have, therefore, not until recently gone into great buildings or sculpture or painting or orchestral music, all demanding a large equipment. Rather have they found their scope in poetry and oratory and song, arts in which the poorest labourer can often compete on fairly equal terms with his richer neighbours. In this way, and in others as well, poverty has been a safeguard of an intensely democratic feeling as well as a help towards the survival of the language and its associations." In the field of human export, too, Ireland's products are scholars, doctors and poets as well as spade-workers.

243 262 114 There are, as we shall try to show, many other features of Irish life which can be related to the pastoral tradition. Because of its value as fodder and for reasons of soil and climate, oats is the "corn" crop of Atlantic Europe. Apart from the value of oats as food for livestock, oatmeal in various forms has been and still is largely consumed, and its baking into thin pan bread over an open fire instead of in an oven has helped to preserve the prehistoric open hearth with its varied 114 and interesting gear and traditions. Ignoring the literary and archæological evidence, many writers have assumed that the inhabitants of ancient Ireland were entirely pastoral and nomadic. On this topic much solemn nonsense has been written, and it gained wide currency because it seemed both to condemn the Irish and to corroborate the prevailing view of man's cultural evolution from hunter to agriculturist through a stage of pastoral nomadism. It now seems certain that man learnt the elements of cultivation at least as soon as he learnt how to domesticate animals, and in the diffusion of these ideas through Europe from the Near East, Ireland received the germs of both sources of food-production at about 114 the same period, let us say 4,000 years ago. There are many 221 signs that in Ireland's dark and middle ages cattle played an even greater role in rural life than in earlier prehistory and later history, but at all times the unit of the fixed family

[TEXT CONTINUES TOP OF P. 10]

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

the purest of linen—the story has often been told—and though the scutching mill with its busy waterwheel is an intimate part of the wintry countryside, the flax and tow soon pass into the factories. But we cannot omit a reference to the picturesque oblong stacks " sleighs " or " rays " in which the flax is built after being taken from the dam and dried. And we have referred in another place (Chapter 7), to the " shows " or waste which comes from the scutching mill.

But the most important crop throughout Ireland, and as a rule the most difficult to save because it comes late in the season, is oats. September is the harvest month, but in the hills October frequently sees the corn uncarried and even uncut. It is on record that in 1817—in Co. Armagh—" the grain was not reaped in many places until after Christmas." Often the equinoctial gales play havoc with the stooks, and in the days of small scattered rundale plots it was customary for each holder to tie his sheaves with a proprietary knot so that he might claim his own.

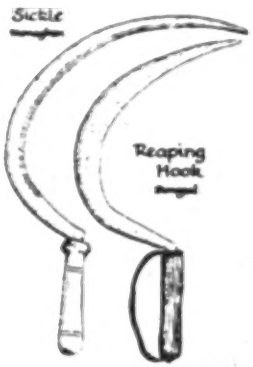

Fig. 53.

Both the toothed hook or sickle (Fig. 53) and the smooth " scythe hook " are used in reaping: the reaping machine and the self-binder have not reached many parts. Sickles are of several varieties, classified in the catalogues as round,

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

square, crane and "Sligo." The steel edge of its narrow blade is notched on the underside, the notches radiating so that they all cut at an angle of about 70 degrees. 243 412

It is much more difficult to use than the smooth hook; the straw must be held firmly in one hand and sawn through with a pulling motion. Some writers have indulged in idealized pictures of hand reaping which bear little relation to the cruel toil and "terrible strain" more faithfully and unforgettably portrayed by Richard Jefferies in his "Field and Hedgerow." There was no respite for reapers or binders: "Down with the head and up with the tail" was the descriptive phrase which I was given in the Glens of Antrim. In some parts, however, the reaper knelt down on one knee. Women and children generally did the binding. The corn was cut before it was fully ripe, "between green and gold," and as an illustration of the interdependence of the old ways it is worth noting that such straw was much more suitable for good thatching than the dry straw from the reaper. The old-fashioned scythe (see Frontispiece), not yet entirely displaced by the new style, was straight-handled. A short bladed tool, known in Co. Antrim as the "bramble scythe," is used for cutting coarse vegetation or mowing hay around bushes.

Corn stooks vary greatly in the number of sheaves they contain and in the methods of construction. They are often tied at the top with a straw band, and cap-sheaves are frequently seen. In wet districts the sheaves are later built into small round stacks, "barts" or "huts," until the time comes to carry them home. On small farms this is still done on the back, using a burden rope (Chapter 14), but the rick-lifter is also employed. Or the sheaves are piled high on ponies so that they resemble walking stacks. At harvest time two-ply twists of straw are worn in the button-hole (Fig. 114): they are part of the ceremonial of harvest time. The custom is general in north-eastern Ireland but I am not aware of it from other parts: it may be a feature of the Plantation. More widespread and fundamental are the practices, now mere 243 [482]

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

243 survivals, associated with the cutting of the last sheaf—the "churn" or the "Cailleach" (Chapter 19).

Corn stacks are more varied in shape than haystacks and need better protection from weather and from vermin. [824] Sprigs of apple-mint (*M. arvensis*) may be thrown through the sheaves to keep away mice. The stone stack-stands or staddels, called "hovels," are a picturesque feature of the stackyard in some districts. With their steep tops rising above the house clusters, the golden corn stacks turn the little Irish villages into African kraals, or in the fields one may count as many as 30 round stacks in a row, rising against the sky up the hillside. Then the whole countryside seems fuller than usual. New colours and odours meet one on all sides, and the horses as they pass give off the sharp smell which comes from crunching the fresh oats. The country smiths used to make a small light fork or "pike," fitted with a long handle, for throwing the last sheaves high up (Fig. 66). The stacks are thatched with rushes, twisted into bundles known as "stapples" which are pushed into the straw.

[285] [415]

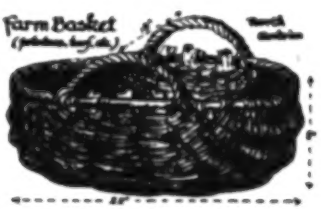

Fig. 54.

241 We cannot touch on the methods of harvesting and stacking the other cereal crops, wheat, barley and rye, but a word must be said in conclusion on the last harvest of the year—the root crops. Although turnips and the new sugar beet are important in some areas, it is the potato crop which means most to the peasant. All available hands are in the fields, gathering the precious food-supply into wicker baskets or boxes (Figs. 54 and 55); and the school children are given

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

281 415 across, are commonly arranged in patterns having, for example, the maker's initials and the date left unpierced. A deeper tray used for carrying corn or for fruit-picking is known as a "dallan." Then there is the meal sieve, which has fine perforations, for sifting the coarse skins (meal seeds) from the oatmeal. Similar to this is the buttermilk sieve with which, 285 415 before the adoption of the hair-sieve, the small particles of butter were strained from the buttermilk. A milk-strainer made of birch bark folded into a cone and filled with straw is referred to in a 17th century account quoted by Mr. E. MacLysaght. In Tory, according to Mr. T. Mason, the wight is "composed simply of sheepskin with a twisted straw rope forming the rim."

The corn sieve, for getting out dust and dirt, and the corn riddle (Fig. 71), for separating bits of straw and "hairy

[281]

Fig. 71.

tails," consist of interwoven splits of ash or bog-fir attached to a rim of the same material. The only difference between them is that the mesh of the former is one-eighth of an inch of the latter perhaps ¼ inch, though it may vary for different kinds of grain. Efficient riddling is a difficult and nowadays rather rare art. I have not come across sieves of rushes or split willow, but it is very likely that they may be found.

243 412 The corn riddle and the winnowing tray lead us back to the thrashing floor in the barn. Here we will probably see a flail hanging on the wall. The sound of the flail is by no means rare in Ireland, for in outlying districts the small farmer has no other means of thrashing. The three parts of the flail are the helve or "hand-stave," a straight stick of any light wood such as ash or larch, the shorter and heavier swingel or beater, called in Ireland the "souple" (generally made of hazel, occasionally of holly or birch) and the flail-joint, hanging or [284] "mid-kipple," which may be a sheep- or goat-skin thong, a

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

 243 412

length of flax, or an eel skin. The methods of attaching the hanging to the hand-stave and souple vary, as will be seen from a random selection of drawings (Fig. 72). The joint [284]

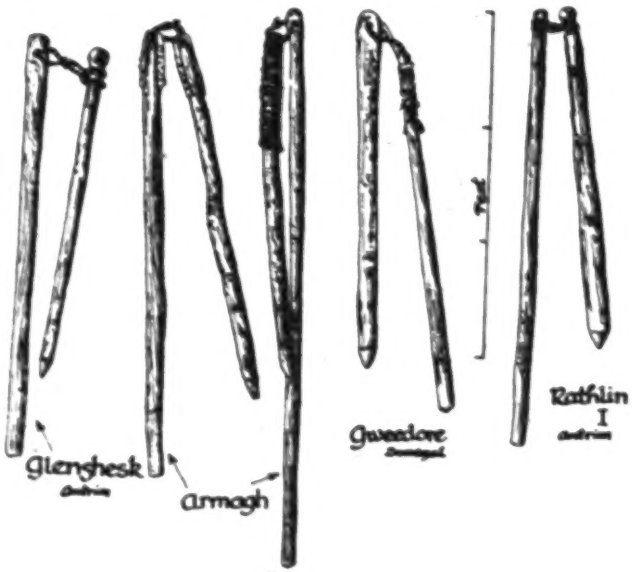

Fig. 72.

shown in the Armagh flail (left), resembles a common English style, but it occurs as far west as Galway. Varied too, are the proportions between the component parts and the methods of swinging the flail. Thus in Antrim the souple is flung round the head while in Donegal it is kept to the side of the body. On fine days the thrashing may take place out of doors, but the usual place is " between doors " in the barn or even in the kitchen, for the opposite doors create a draught which carries away the dust. A besom of heather or of dried kale flower-stalks keeps the barn floor clean. [824]

One of the most interesting and varied and probably one of the oldest crafts practised by countryfolk is the making of 285

10: Browne D-5 (1893) 1894
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Inishbofin

352 stools, and a rough table or two, with a dresser containing a scanty assortment of coarse earthenware, a spinning-wheel, and a quilting-frame, constitute the furniture of the kitchen. In one corner is a pile of turf for fuel, on which the fowl roost, and above the couples are stored the dried fish, &c., for the winter's use, and the agricultural and piscatorial implements.

415 The domestic utensils consist of the usual large three-legged pot, slung on a crook over the fire, a griddle, a frying-pan, and, perhaps, 352 a quern, a boran or sieve of sheepskin stretched over a wicker frame, and a couple of skids or shallow, circular wicker baskets. The furniture of the bedroom, or rooms, consists of a couple of tent beds; a few chairs and, perhaps, a small table. There is very rarely a loft 231 to the house. At night the cattle, fowl, and pigs are taken into the kitchen, the pigs being accommodated in a pen beside the fire-place, while the cattle are fastened at the opposite side of the room.

[491] 6. *Transport.*—The roads are good, and extend over a large part of the islands, but are only used for foot traffic and cattle, as there are 492 no wheeled vehicles of any description, and all goods are carried [482] either in hampers slung on the back, the usual method of taking home potatoes, &c., or in two wicker panniers or cleaves, slung across the back of a pony or donkey, one or other of which is owned by nearly every family. The harness of these animals is home-made, and of primitive design, the panniers, manufactured from osiers grown on the islands, being slung from pegs on a wooden frame, beneath which, to protect the animal's back, is a thick straw mat saddle. Both sexes ride on the horses behind the panniers, and both adopt the same position, a side-ways posture, the men not riding astride.

● [243] The method of taking home the harvest is picturesque; the ponies have cloths hung over their faces to prevent their eating the grain, and are then literally clothed with sheaves, which are hung all round them, and piled up so as to give them the appearance of walking straw stacks.

501 For water transport there are a good many boats of various [505] descriptions, the primary use of which is for fishing; only one, the post-boat, which goes thrice a week to the mainland if the weather permits, being regularly used for transport.

The number and classification of the boats are, it is believed, given correctly below, but it was difficult to get any two accounts to agree.

There are five hookers, seven pookauns,[1] fifteen curraghs, one yawl, and about thirty rowing-boats.

[1] An undecked sailing-boat, cutter rigged.

10: Browne D-5 (1893) 1894
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Inishbofin

The spinning-wheel and hand-loom are the same as those commonly used on the west coast, the former, as usual, having no treadle. 172 [283]

Querns are still in use, and in connection with them the boran, or sieve of sheepskin stretched over a wicker frame, used for screening the meal. [252] [412]

Grain is still winnowed by shaking it in a sieve in a strong wind. [243]

The method of washing clothes is the same as that customary in Connemara, the clothes being folded, laid in the water of a lake or pool, and beaten with a club or paddle. [296]

The tailor, when making clothes, does not measure his customers with a tape, but takes all his measurements on one sheet of paper, marking the lengths by cutting notches out of the edge. [294]

The curraghs, which are still in use, are of the usual form; they are rapidly going out of fashion, however. [501]

The anchor used for small boats is a stone, not fixed in a wooden clamp, as in Clare and Aran, but having a groove around it for the rope.

As mentioned previously, the apparatus used for the shark-fishing is very rude and primitive.

2. *Antiquities.*— Inishbofin is not very rich in architectural antiquities, and the few that still remain are being rapidly destroyed; some ruins which were standing in the first half of the present century have altogether disappeared, and the others are much shattered. 172

In Inishshark, also, the buildings have sustained a great injury.

It does not lie within my province to enter upon any detailed description of the ruins; but I desire, in the following notes (extracted almost *verbatim* from my Field Note-book), to direct the attention of archæologists to the buildings of interest in these islands which are being rapidly blotted out of existence. The number and nature of these have been described by the late Mr. O'Donovan, Mr. Hardiman, Mr. G. H. Kinahan, and others.

In the account of their present condition given below, they are arranged in the order in which they are described by Mr. Hardiman.[1]

Inishbofin.—(1). St. Colman's church, in Knock townland, built in A.D. 667, is in a very ruinous state, and the interior is filled with rough gravestones and weeds, and in a small recess near the east window is a pile of crania and broken bones. In the enclosure around the church the foundations of the cells (cloghans (?)) of the abbey, or monastic colony, may still be traced, though with difficulty, but the

[1] "Hi-Iar Connaught," p. 116, footnote.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

PLATE 4

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"Lashing" rye, Aran Islands. Note the woven belt (criss) supporting the hand-woven tweed trousers.

[facing p. 49]

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Antrim

PLATE 6

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41.

1. Shearing oats with the toothed sickle, Co. Antrim.

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2. Threshing oats with flails, Co. Antrim.

[FACING P. 97]

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Donegal

PLATE 7

243
133

Winnowing oats with a skin wight, Co. Donegal.

[facing p. 112]

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

farms today. The scythed grass is shaken out by hand and spread thinly over the field. When partly dry it is gathered into windrows and lapped or coiled, that is folded against the leg over the forearm into small 'lap-cocks' resembling a lady's muff, the hole permitting the wind to pass through and the smooth rounded top allowing the rain to run off. Like all practised hand-work it is a job carried through with apparently mechanical indifference, but the old hands will take care to ensure that the laps are properly made and laid down so that they are aligned with the prevailing wind. Even on rich lowland farms the hay will be 'lapped' if it is first season's grass grown, as in Ulster, for the seed, which is a valuable export. Alternatively seed grass is tied in sheaves and 'gaited' like flax or stooked like a cereal crop (Fig. 51).

FIG. 51. Laps of hay, gaits of flax and stook of wheat, with 'hudders'.

When dry the laps are shaken open and built into small cocks or lumps which are later enlarged into hand cocks. Or if the hay is in good condition it is made, chiefly in the drier parts of the country, into larger ricks or tramp cocks which are trodden down firmly and secured with a hay-rope (Fig. 52, 10). The process of hay-making is thus, like the winning of turf (Chapter XIV), one of gradually increasing the size of the pile as the material is dried by sun and wind. The cocked hay is left standing for some weeks in the fields to season, so that it seems to the English visitor, as Arthur Young remarked, that the Irish are generally two months 'making or marring their hay'.[1] The explanation given is the necessity of avoiding overheating, but English critics say that it is the farmers who dislike getting overheated! A more charitable view is that by the

[1] A. Young, *Tour*, 2, 246.

[Text continues on p. 155]

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

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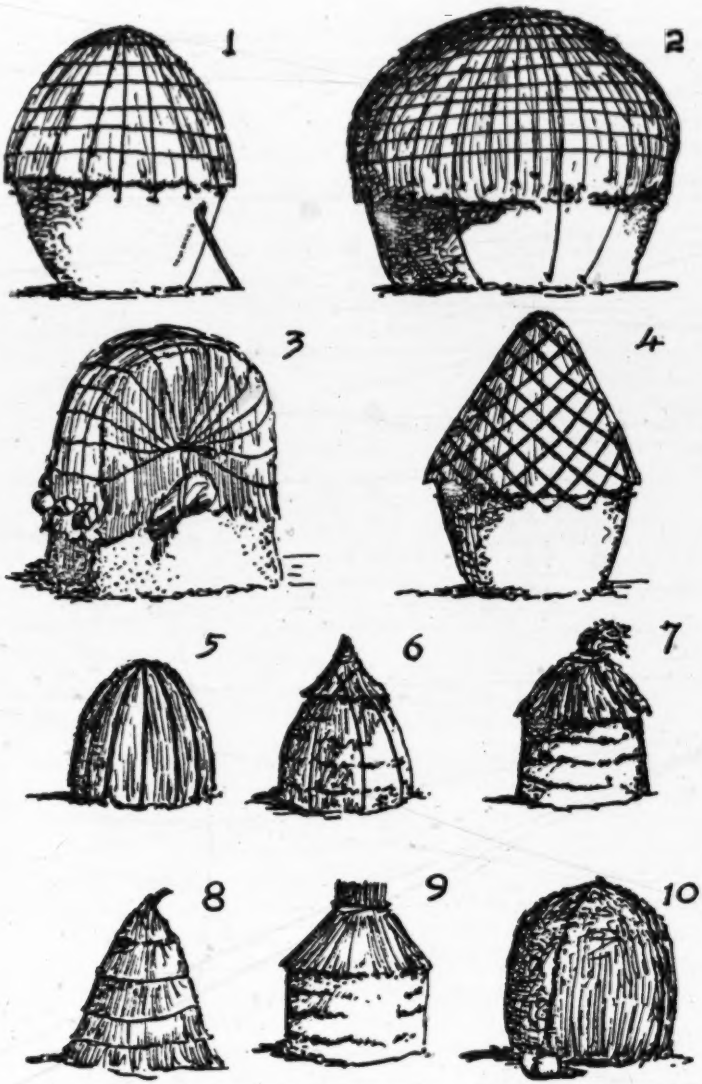

FIG. 52. Stacks and huts roped in many patterns. (1) Cavan (flax). (2) Cork (hay). (3) Mayo (hay). (4) Antrim (oats). (5) Donegal (hay). (6) Donegal (oats). (7) Down (oats). (8) Down (seed hay). (9) Cavan (oats). (10) Down (tramp-cock of hay).

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

HARVEST

When the scythe was transferred from the mowing of hay to the cutting of corn during the second half of last century there was much opposition from the reapers, sometimes for the good reason that little fields full of great boulders or the stumps of bog-fir gave no space to swing a scythe, and a single blow on the fast-moving point may ruin the blade. But one suspects that conservatism was rooted in magic. It is said that the rice-growers of Malaya refuse to use a scythe because its slashing motion would frighten away the spirits of the rice. Some such notion may have strengthened the Irishman's condemnation of the scythe. And I find another curious parallel with the Far East. The Malayan reaper hums like an insect while he is cutting the rice, perhaps to soothe the spirits of the living crop. In Ireland there is an old belief that an insect kept in a little box fastened to the handle of hook or scythe will bring luck and give the blade greater cutting power. Both scythe and sickle are personal possessions and their luck is personal: they are loaned with reluctance. When a sickle is borrowed it should not be passed directly from hand to hand but thrown on the ground and then picked up. This belief, which applies to all pointed objects, may be explained by the danger of handling a sharp tool, for bad luck is often related to bad practice.

But before coming to corn harvest the handling of flax should be described. Unpleasant handling it is, even if not quite so onerous (and odorous) as working with hemp or jute. When grown for fibre flax is harvested after the pale blue flowers have fallen but before the seed ripens, and because it is the stalk that is being harvested it is not cut but pulled up by the roots. 'Lint' is a crop of the small family farm, for many hands are required, teams or 'boons' of anything from half a dozen to thirty people gathering from neighbouring farms and working together in a festival spirit which reaches its climax in the evening dance. The tough flax is hard on the hands and the stooping is back-breaking. But the beets (sheaves) are carefully put together, for they have to be spread after retting and the stalks should lie evenly. The three handfuls which compose the beet are laid down at slightly different angles so that they will separate easily. A standard beet is reckoned to be 22 inches in diameter. The bands (ties) are prepared beforehand and consist

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

HARVEST

243 Corn harvest did not begin until a certain set day which differed in various parts of the country, and the appointed day was a time of much excitement. The following description of [171] the Reaping Blessing in the Scottish Highlands would probably apply to Ulster, though I have not found a record of it in Ireland. 'The day the reaping began was one of commotion and ceremonial. The whole family repaired to the field dressed in their best . . . the father of the family took his sickle and, facing the sun, cut a handful of corn. Putting it three times sunwise round his head, the Reaping Blessing was sung'.[1] We know that in Ireland it was the custom for the first sheaves cut to be scutched or lashed, that is the grain was beaten out without using the flail. The winnowed grain was parched over the fire, ground in a quern and boiled in time to make a breakfast for the reapers.[2] This ceremonial breakfast undoubtedly preserves archaic practices.

Reaping with hook or sickle is by no means uncommon on little hill farms where fields are small and uneven, but the days of the great 'gatherings' are no more, when down to late in the last century as many as seventy men might have been seen at work. Most of the lore of these reaping boons has passed away unrecorded, and we get only glimpses of the terrible strain imposed on the toilers and the compensating gaieties. The [558] pressure was most severe when to the rivalry between workers was added the drive of a pace-setter, for it was a mark of disgrace not to keep pace. In Ulster the leader of the boon was 'stubble hook', so called because his ridge was the first of the 'set', next the stubble. (A set was the number of ridges equal to the number of reapers in the boon). The driver, called 'corn-land', took the rig or land next to the standing corn, and between the two the other reapers on their ridges would strive to keep a straight line. 'A bad shearer', runs the Ulster saying, [539] 'always gets a big rig and a blunt hook'. But a spirited reaper, I have been told, 'would die upon the rig before he would suffer "corn-land" to pass him'. Between each set a rest was taken at the 'land-end' and it was an interlude of 'crack and courting'. If we may judge from a Scottish custom, any visiting

[1] A. Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, I (1928).
[2] *Béaloideas*, 10, 295.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

stranger was accosted and held down on the ground, a woman would lie on top of him and another woman would tumble them over.[1] Such horse-play was more than a consequence of the high spirits of harvest, the 'rural saturnalia' described by Richard Jefferies in *The Toilers of the Field*. Displays of the rites and symbols of fertility were closely bound up with the bounty of harvest.

There were many variations in the methods of reaping, or shearing—to use the old term—depending on the type of hook, which might be smooth or notched, on the width of the ridges, the condition of the crop and so on. The toothed sickle is probably the older implement, going back to the time when iron was a new metal and could not be given a sharp steel edge. Whereas the smooth or scythe hook is wielded with a slashing cut which may spill the grain, especially of rye, if the crop is ripe and the edge not kept very keen, the sickle is pulled towards the shearer, who holds each bunch as it is cut, pressing it back into the standing corn. As a rule three handfuls or 'loghters' go to each sheaf, the bands of which are prepared beforehand and laid out for the reaper to place the loghters on them straight from the hook (Pl. 6, 1).

The term shearing implies that the crop was cut close to the ground as wool is clipped from a sheep, and indeed urban officials have been known to confuse the operations. Pride was taken in a stubble-field that looked as if it had been shaved. 'Low and clean' was the injunction, 'cut it down to the living earth!' 'Down with the head and up with the tail' were my instructions when I lent a hand at harvest in the Glens of Antrim. Mercifully one worked uphill: where the land was level the reaper would go down on one knee, wearing a knee-pad. If the ridges were wide there might be two shearers and one binder to each ridge, the shearers working from the furrows on each side, the depth of which minimized the amount of stooping required. A 'crack hooksman' could reap and tie fifty twelve-sheaf stooks a day, or say an Irish acre (= 1⅗ English acres). It is necessary to have worked with a gang of reapers to appreciate the relentless pace of the work and at the same time the care with which every operation is carried out. There must be no

[1] M. Banks, *British Calendar Customs, Scotland*, I (1937).

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

243 heads of corn at the wrong end, or they would be missed in thrashing with the flail, and for the same reason the ears of the straw band-knot should lie towards the top of the sheaf. The sheaves should be laid with their butts to the wind, for these need most drying. The bands should be tied with nice judgement, tight but not over-tight: one should not be able to put the toe of one's boot under the band when one stands on the butt of the sheaf.

[461] As in all farming operations conducted in traditional ways, music and magic to ease the labour were part of the scene. There were shearing songs to match the rhythm of the sickle, [825] and its efficiency was improved by keeping a fly or other insect imprisoned in the handle; perhaps its incessant activity was meant to speed up the work. Another strange belief was that [777] luck followed the reaper who carried a child on his back. The world of magic and fairy was close by at harvest time: it was believed that the top grain (pickle) of every stalk of corn was empty because it had been taken by the fairies and was their due. The sheaf had its share of lore, too, related possibly to its [754] semblance of human shape. A curse could be worked by sticking pins into the joints of the straw, and the sheaf might be properly waked and buried so that as it withered the object of the curse would decline. Stooks with their 'hudders' (Fig. 51) (hooding sheaves) also take on human forms, and I have known various terms for these large stooks applied as nicknames to broad-based country women. 'The last sheaf' also is known as the cailleach or hag.

Beliefs and customs connected with the last sheaf are legion and find their counterparts in many parts of the world. 'Winning the churn' was an incentive to the reaper, for good luck attended those who had their rigs sheared quickly if only because they avoided the ill-luck of being last. Stories are told of rigs being left unclaimed and uncut because their owners feared to incur 'the famine of the farm', of having the hag to feed until next harvest. The basis of this belief was that the last sheaf was sometimes hidden overnight in the corn of lazy farmers, who would watch at nights and reap by moonlight to avoid what was an omen of misfortune or death.

[787] The last handful of standing corn, selected for the purpose,

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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was twisted into a three-stranded plait. Standing back at a mark, the reapers threw their spinning hooks at it in turn until it was severed and 'stretched'. At this a triumphant shout was raised. The cailleach was sometimes 'waked' before it was lifted: the 'corpse' was hung round the neck of the triumphant slayer, who was guest at the subsequent 'churn' (the harvest feast and dance) and who was fated to be the reaper who would be first married. It was, perhaps, more usual for the cailleach to be put around the neck of the master or mistress of the house. From the threat of being hanged by it they would purchase their freedom by providing the churn supper, for which special food was prepared. There are many variant practices but it is clear that they all turn on the same themes, the spirit of the corn and the luck of a speedy harvest. In some districts the cailleach was known as the hare, and the cry which kept the toiling shearers to their task was; 'We'll put the hare out of it today!'

It was customary to hang the churn in the kitchen, either over the door, on the dresser, or about the chimney hearth, and to keep it until the following harvest, when it was given to the cows. Or it might be fed to the horses on the first day of ploughing. In some houses the last sheaf was preserved year after year, and I have seen specimens half a century old. One of these was dressed with coloured papers, hinting that there was formerly more ceremony connected with the last sheaf than has survived. These dressed cailleachs figure in the harvest festival decoration in some churches in Co. Armagh, where also miniature corn ricks surmounted by a harvest knot are displayed, the Church thus having won over and preserved the pagan symbols of harvest (See Tailpiece).

Harvest knots or bows are decorative twists of straw which were worn by the harvesters, and are still quite commonly carried by young men at harvest time in some districts (Plate 18, 1). Girls would wear them in their hair, boys in their coats, and in former times they were exchanged by the sexes as a sign of mutual attachment. They are made in a fine plait of two straws tied into loops or interlaced, those worn by the girls having the ears of the corn left on. The best examples are made from wheat, and some exceptionally fine specimens are made from

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243 [301] grasses and flax. The many practical uses of straw will be described in a later chapter and its employment in fashioning various kinds of dolls, ceremonial dresses and masks, for example on St. Briget's Day. Certain protective charms were also made of oat-straw, for example the Bratóg Brighde (St. Briget's rag or mantle) worn by the fishermen of Tory Island as a protection against storms. Here the explanation may lie in the power of wind over bits of loose straw which by association gives the straw the secret of controlling the wind. This is the basis of the phrase used in Co. Cavan to describe something which circulates quickly: 'going round like the straws'. It was the custom to ward off storms by running with a handful of straws from one farm to another.

789 243 [195] [821]

With corn, as with hay and turf, the harvesting proceeds by building up stooks and ricks of increasing size according to the nature of the crop and the weather conditions. Little stooks (footings) of four or six sheaves are the first stage in the construction of the twelve-sheaf stooks (ten standing and two inverted hooding sheaves) which, however, are generally confined to wheat (Fig. 51). It is the general practice to build the little stooks of corn, after one or two weeks' seasoning, into hand-stacks which are of a convenient size to make a load for the rick-shifter, or for the tractor-lifter which is replacing it. The shapes of these miniature stacks, varying from one district to another, are often extremely picturesque, and their serried rows marching up the hillsides give the autumn fields a populated appearance. Their many names (hut, shig, bart, adag, and so on) would indicate that they are no novelty, and these little field stacks are as characteristic of Wales and Scotland as they are of Ireland (Fig. 52). A picturesque variety of hay-stack, commonly seen in Connacht, is the sheep-cock, built around a tall pole which prevents the cock from collapsing when eaten away at the base.

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PLATE 13

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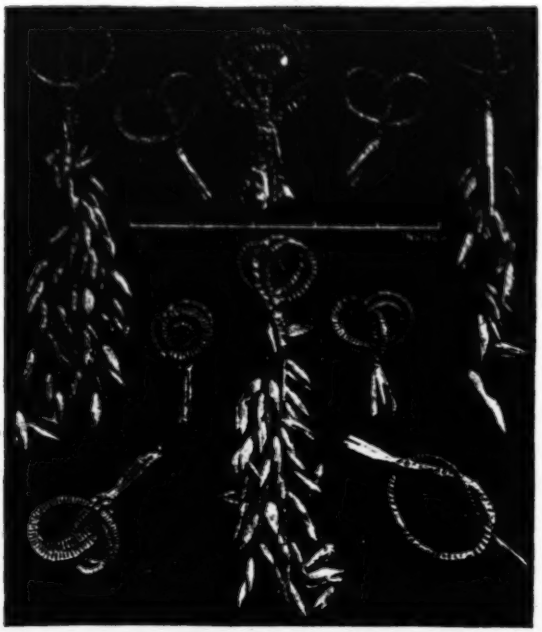
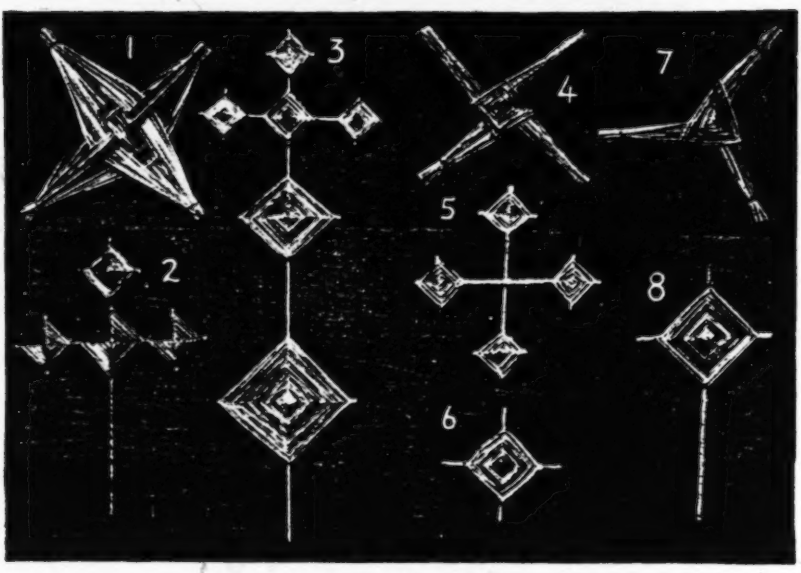


1. Harvest knots, Co. Armagh.



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2. Bridget's Crosses, Co. Armagh.

[facing p. 192]

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as the work of specialists (Fig. 71). The pampooties of the Aran Islands deserve mention here. Made of calfskin, but formerly of sealskin,[1] these one-piece shoes were once doubtless widely worn and have kept their hold in Aran because of their suitability for wet rocks and frail curraghs. The rivlins of Scotland and the Highland *bròganan* were very similar and I have seen rawhide shoes of the same type from Norway and the Pyrenees. They all have the hair outside and are secured by lacing back and front.

The wight serves both to hold corn, in filling a sack for instance, and to convey peats from the stack to the fireside: perforated it becomes a meal-sieve (boran) for sifting the skins (seeds) from oatmeal, or a buttermilk sieve for taking out the last grains of butter from the churn. The winnowing tray or dallan is a larger version, and it, too, may be perforated to allow the wind to pass through as the corn is shaken out on to a spread cloth. There are, up and down Ireland, many bold windy Shilling Hills where the 'shellings' (husks) were, in past times, separated from the grain in this way (Pl. 7).

This brings us to the flail and its 'hanging' (the mid-kipple, hooden, gad, middling, or tug) which was commonly a thong of cow-, horse-, sheep, or goat-skin, though sometimes of rabbit- or eel-skin or a cord of flax. The flail, the proverbial 'stick-and-a-half', consists of a three to four feet long helve or hand-staff, usually made of ash, and a shorter beater, swingle or souple of hazel or holly. There are two principal methods of 'hanging' the parts together. In one variety, the tie passes through two leather caps lashed over the ends (Fig. 72, 1). This appears to be a variant of the common English flail-hanging, where, however, the cap is made of steamed ash or yew and there is no linking piece. Its distribution in Ireland, down the east coast, points to derivation from England. Modifications, occurring as far west as Donegal (Fig. 72, 1*a*, *b*), have the linking thong passing through a hole made either in the helve or in the beater. Kevin Danaher states that the capped flail is characteristic of central Europe: it is believed to have first appeared in north France in the early Middle Ages.[2] The

[1] O'Flaherty, *H'Ier Connaught*, 59 (footnote).
[2] *J.C.H. and A. Soc.*, 60 (1955), 6–14.

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412 other method of hanging has a somewhat peripheral distribu-
171 tion in Europe (Scandinavia, Poland, Yugoslavia, Switzerland,
284 the Pyrenees) and also in Ireland, and as its simplicity as well as its distribution suggest, it is the older type. The tie passes around grooves cut in both hand-staff and souple (Fig. 72, 2) though again there are variants, one end of the tie, for example, being passed through a hole (Fig. 72, 2*a*). The grooved hanging, it is claimed by its users, is superior to the capped because the join is almost universal and there is no need to turn the halve in the hand when flailing. The holed fastening may be the most ancient method of all: it is found in parts of Atlantic Europe and the Baltic lands, but in Ireland is apparently restricted to Ulster (Pl. 6, 2).

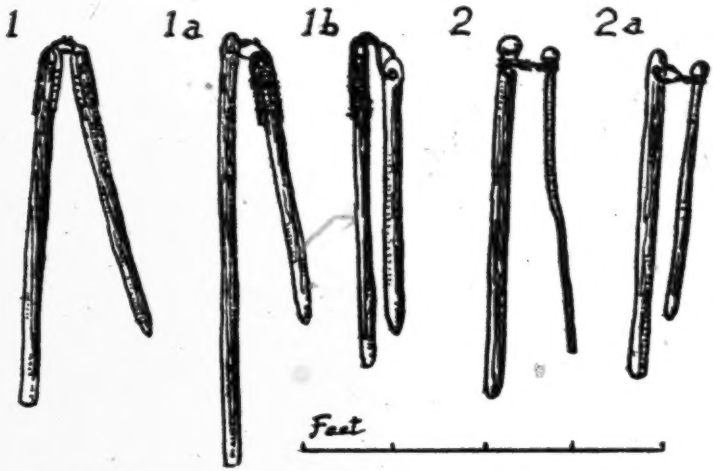

FIG. 72. Flails. (1) Co. Meath. (1*a*) Co. Armagh. (1*b*) Co. Donegal. (2) Co. Cavan. (2*a*) Co. Antrim.

243 Ancient and rudimentary as the flail is, requiring for its
412 making no tool save a sharp knife, there are some thrashers
171 who dispense with it, 'scutching' the corn instead with a stick or 'lashing' it over a barrel, a stone or a board (Plate 4). Many a small farmer in the north of Ireland harvests his seed grass in this way. The scutching method is used also in the

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Pyrenees and in Africa, but the flail, apparently spreading through western Europe in post-Roman times, in time replaced it almost everywhere, to be in turn displaced by the mechanical thrasher. Thus the sound of the flail has almost gone from the countryside. The best thrashing place is the floor of the barn above the byre, with its opposite doors to draw the wind and advertise the flailer's industry. Such barns, however, were not built outside the planted districts before agrarian changes and improvements spread in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Ireland knows nothing of the carefully built thrashing floors of England and Scandinavia. At best on the farms lacking a barn a thrashing board was sometimes kept, a square wooden platform raised a few inches off the ground. A good thrashing floor should bend to meet the flail, and in Scandinavia, for instance, great pains were taken in the old days to construct floors which would make the flails sing. They were occasionally strung with wires, and to magnify the echo of clay floors a horse's skull was buried under each corner.[1] It has been thought that this purpose was secondary to the luck it was hoped would follow from what was originally a foundation sacrifice. In Ireland traditions of the burying of horses' skulls under the floors of dwelling houses are both widespread and well authenticated. The usual explanation again is that this gives the house an echo, but it is also said to be lucky, and Sean O'Sullivan concludes that the custom of burying skulls began as a substitute for foundation sacrifices.[2] In Armagh 'the frontal bones of a horse's head are regarded as being peculiarly sonsie; they were often buried in barn floors and under the thresholds of dwelling houses for that reason.'[3]

In time, the expressed object came to be to magnify the music of the singing flails as well as that of the ballad-singing and dancing before the fire. The space between the doors of the old style kitchen-byre, it will be recalled, was a favourite thrashing place in times past. The Briget's Crosses above the door would have blessed the thrashing as well as the cattle. It

[1]Albert Sandkelf, *Singing Flails* (Folklore Fellows Communications, Helsinki, No. 136), (1949).
[2]Seán Ó Súilleabháin, *J.R.S.A.I.*, 75 (1945), 45–52.
[3]J. Donaldson, *Upper Fens in 1838*, 77.

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243 789 is worth noticing that symbols in the form of a swastika, but including also circles, pentagrams and horses, were formerly cut as protective devices in the beams of barns in Scandinavia. Some of the designs are reminiscent of the art of the Bronze Age.

243 An Irish verse giving the four essentials of a good thrashing, collected in Co. Armagh, runs in translation:

[539]

> A hand-staff of holly,
> A souple of hazel,
> A single sheaf,
> And a clean floor.

This is where the besom of heather or bent comes in: it is still preferred to the sweeping-broom for a clay floor or to get into the joins of boards or cobbles. Thrashing was a daily job, carried out on well-run farms night and morning before the cattle were fed. It was held that the cattle throve best on freshly thrashed oats, and the storage of grain would anyhow have been difficult where there were no barns.[1] For this reason, too, the level 'street' in front of the house, or even the public road was often the most suitable floor available. The thrashing was usually done on a strong linen sheet. Publicity as well as a steady echoing beat seem to have been the desired aims. Everywhere prestige has attached to a noisy thrashing, and partly no doubt for self-aggrandisement a solitary thrasher would beat with his feet to make the noise of two. Everywhere too the sound of the flail has been turned into jingles and rustic rhymes. They did not accompany the work itself because it was too noisy and too exhausting to allow talking or singing. The flails' beaters made their own merry music; was it, one wonders, originally intended to drive away evil spirits from the precious food supply?

[555]

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222 824 In this chapter we have confined ourselves to some of the things that were made at home out of materials that lay to hand. To describe the utilization of all the lesser plants that have

[343] [1]Mr. A. T. Lucas, however, has described traditional outdoor granaries, now restricted to west Cork, constructed of thick straw ropes, which when completed resemble round stacks (*Gwerin*, I (1956), 2–20). Mr. V. B. Proudfoot calls my attention to the similar 'corn bykes' of Caithness (*P.S.A.S.* (1932), 136–7).